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7.12.7 Integration

Many countries revised their national integration strategies throughout 2019 or started the process to review existing programmes. Indeed, UNHCR recommended to the Croatian and German EU Presidencies to continue to encourage Member States to further invest in integration.[597]

The ReSOMA project published a synthetic report on future EU funding to support the integration of beneficiaries of international protection and migrants.[598] MPI Europe presented a new toolkit for integration policies.[599]

In addition, FRA provided an overview of good practices and challenges in particular concerning the integration of young refugees. It emphasised the importance of swift asylum procedures and effective family reunification mechanisms, and addressed mental health needs.[600]

Integration mechanisms in Germany, as the top destination country in Europe, were analysed by the MPI.[601]

New strategies and programmes

In 2019, Norway reconfirmed the strategy “Integration through Knowledge: 2019-2022”,[602] which emphasises improved access to tailored education, vocational training and qualification programmes. On 17 January 2019, the four governmental parties entered a coalition agreement which focuses on strengthening Norway’s integration policy to ensure that immigrants participate in work and social life to a greater extent.[603]

The government of Norway also proposed a new Integration Act to put more emphasis on training participants in the introduction programme (mostly refugees) on the skills required by Norwegian employers or needed to qualify for further education. New legislation would make the mapping of skills and career guidance mandatory before beginning the introduction programme and would change the provision of language support from required hours to a required level. The standard two-year programme is planned to be replaced by a wider range of programmes from three months to four years (NO LEG 01).

Furthermore, the Parliament in Norway transferred some central integration tasks to regional authorities, including giving information and advice to municipalities on good practices and on the qualifications of refugees. New criteria were introduced on the allocation of refugees to municipalities, including the state of the local labour market, the results of the integration

programme in a municipality and the municipality’s success and capacity to foster integration.

In Denmark, the integration and job training programme, IGU,[604] which combines work and language training, has been extended by an additional three years.

In Iceland, the Ministry of Social Affairs issued a report including a plan on how to address differentiated treatment by aligning the service support provided to resettled and other refugees in Icelandic society.[605]

Law No. 178/2019 made important changes in the integration programme for beneficiaries of international protection in Romania. The deadline for submitting an application for the integration programme was extended from 30 days to 3 months. The previous legislation established that the integration programme for beneficiaries of international protection had a duration of 12 months with the possibility of revision at
6 months, and the new legislation foresees that the reference period can be prolonged with another
6 months only in exceptional situations for a total duration of 18 months. An NGO representative may be present during the interview conducted by an integration officer of the General Inspectorate for Immigration–Asylum and Integration Directorate (IGI-DAI), who determines the scope of the support measures to be provided. The socio-cultural counselling and activities must be organised by IGI-DAI in collaboration with local authorities, while this collaboration was optional under previous legislation. Local support teams may be established involving IGI-DAI, local authorities, public institutions and NGO representatives to support beneficiaries of international protection in having their rights and benefits fulfilled (RO LEG 01).[606]

The Integrated Communities Action Plan was published in the United Kingdom in February 2019. The plan includes cross-government measures aimed at building a stronger, integrated society based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities.[607]

The Finnish Parliament reviewed the effectiveness of migrant integration in the country and requested the government to prepare a comprehensive action plan and propose reforms to the current system. In response, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment began preparations for an inter-sectoral government integration programme for the period 2020-2023.

The French government launched a debate in the National Assembly and the Senate on French and European migration policy. The Prime Minister evaluated the results of amendments introduced in September 2018 and put forward several major guidelines shaping the French migration policy, including improving integration policies and the reception of applicants for international protection. Both the Inter-ministerial Committee on Integration (C2I), which was held on 5 June 2018 under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister, and the Act for Controlled Immigration, Effective Right of Asylum and Successful Integration took ambitious measures for the renewal of the French integration policy.

Several measures concerning language training courses, civic training and access to employment came into effect on 1 March 2019 in France. Additional funding considerably

strengthened the integration policy for newcomers; beneficiaries of international protection are considered as newly-arrived foreigners.

Finally, the C2I, missioned the Inter-ministerial Delegation for the Hosting and Integration of Refugees (Diair) to lead the implementation of the National Strategy for the Integration of Refugees.

Cyprus signed a grant agreement for 2020-2022 to develop and monitor a national integration plan for legally-residing third country nationals. Six other grant agreements were signed with local authorities and civil society organisations for a variety of integration activities.

In Estonia, the development plan, Integrating Estonia 2030,[608] was merged into a new plan, A Vibrant Population and a Cohesive Society 2030.[609] The Internal Security Development Plan 2020-2030, currently being completed, highlights the importance of Estonian language training and lists support services (adaption, integration, employment services, counselling and rehabilitation) which are available for applicants and recipients of international protection. The Ministry of the Interior commissioned a study on the integration of newly-arrived migrants, including beneficiaries of international protection, the results of which were published in 2019. The study presented best practices and remaining challenges in the country's integration process.[610]

The new action plan for the integration of beneficiaries of international protection was under discussion in Croatia in 2019, and the new Permanent Commission for the Integration of Foreigners in Croatian Society, responsible for the coordination of the plan's implementation, widened its membership to include representatives from local and regional authorities and NGOs.[611] The Ministry of the Interior launched a tender under AMIF to select a civil society organisation to carry out a three-year project in providing assistance in the integration of beneficiaries of international protection.[lviii]

The elaboration of a new strategic plan for immigrant integration continued in Spain. The Forum for Social Integration of Immigrants, which involves several public administration bodies, civil society organisations and migrant associations, was reactivated in 2019.

The Expert Commission on the Framework Conditions for Integration met for the first time in Germany. Its objective is to look at the structural issues of integration and propose initiatives to improve integration standards.

Implementation of existing strategies

Other countries focused on the implementation of current strategies. For example, the Greek government launched in 2019 the HELIOS 2 project as part of the National Integration Strategy, implemented by the IOM and its partners. The project aims to support beneficiaries residing in temporary accommodation schemes to integrate into Greek society and offers integration courses and support in acquiring accommodation and employment. It monitors progress and will launch initiatives to sensitise the host community.

The Czech government approved the action plan for 2020 to implement its integration strategy adopted in 2016.[612]

To review the implementation of policies, the first Austrian Integration Summit was organised at the end of the year in Vienna.[613]

The Ministry of Social Security and Labour in Lithuania continued to implement the National Integration Action Plan (LT LEG 03), in close collaboration with UNHCR and all relevant stakeholders in integration.

The Irish government published the mid-term review of the Migrant Integration Strategy 2017-2020[614] and noted that a number of significant milestones were achieved, such as the establishment of the Communities Integration Fund[615] and the adoption of the Second National Intercultural Health Strategy.[616] The Communities Integration Fund continued to offer grants for local integration projects, providing a total of EUR 526 000 in 2019.

As an important institutional change, the Department of Integration was created in Luxembourg within the Ministry of Family Affairs, Integration and the Greater Region. Its mandate includes to further develop the three phases of the Guided Integration Trail. The Ministry also granted funding to the Luxembourgish Red Cross, LISKO, to promote integration at the local level and support local authorities in fostering the integration of beneficiaries of international protection.

The Hungarian Helsinki Committee signalled again that Hungary had withdrawn integration services to beneficiaries of international protection since 2016[617] and the country was assessed to provide the least advantageous integration framework for refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection.[618] Similarly, no new targeted integration strategy was adopted in Bulgaria since the first National Integration Programme for the Integration of Refugees came to an end in 2013.

The National Integration Evaluation Mechanism assessed the integration framework for beneficiaries of international protection in 14 countries (Czechia, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden) and published the European benchmark for the integration of refugees.[619] The report noted that the quality of integration policies varies to a great extent, despite EU standards, and all assessed countries could provide more integration services, even those which have integration frameworks in place.

The Dutch Advisory Committee on Migration Affairs published two evaluations related to the current integration system. The first report assessed the civic integration system and concluded that the policy focus should be more on encouragement, reward and adequate support with a more-developed role for municipalities, instead of coercion and punishment.[620] The second assessment monitored the functioning of the market of educational activities related to civic integration, based on the idea that private language schools would compete with each other for participants by increasing the quality of services. The Committee noted that the structure of the system was inadequate, and thus, participants did not act as empowered and informed

consumers.[621]

The UK Home Office published the third edition of the Indicators of Integration framework, which was created in collaboration with academics, local authorities, civil society organisations and beneficiaries of international protection to understand and measure the integration of migrants and beneficiaries.[622]

Strengthening local authorities

Continuing on efforts of previous years, the role of local authorities and municipalities was further enhanced throughout the integration process. For example, local authorities in Italy received more responsibilities and more funding to implement the System of Protection for Beneficiaries of International protection and Unaccompanied Foreign Minors (SIPROIMI).

Civil society organisations were active at the local level in many countries, for example in Austria, Croatia, France, Germany and Spain. To help local governments, the ReSOMA project published several documents on formulating a long-term comprehensive approach to integration at local level.[623]

Following discussions between the Ministry of Social Security and Labour in Lithuania, stakeholders and UNHCR, AMIF funding was tailored in Lithuania[624] to provide EUR 1.7 million to engage six municipalities in refugee and migrant integration by creating local-level action plans, improving integration infrastructure and strengthening competences.

In Iceland, UNHCR and the Ministry of Social Affairs arranged three training sessions on the Inter-Cultural Cities programme (ICC) in different parts of Iceland.[625] The aim was to equip municipal employees with basic skills to engage with refugees.

In Estonia and Latvia, the ICC organised seminars on “Diversity and Inclusion in Cities”.[626] Events were also organised to introduce the ICC concept and approach to local and regional authorities, inviting them to join the programme.[627]

In a cooperation with Latvian Red Cross, UHNCR conducted training sessions[628] in five Latvian municipalities. The training aimed to build capacity and expertise for more than 100 service providers, public authorities and representatives of local communities. It focused on refugee inclusion, inter-cultural competencies, diversity and inclusion policies at the regional and local levels.

Among major developments, municipalities in the Netherlands received an additional EUR 40 million for 2019 and 2020 to become more involved in the counselling of beneficiaries of international protection in their civic integration and language learning. The new civic integration system will enter into force in 2021, which will shift some responsibility from the individual to the municipality to ensure that participants in the civic integration programmes, including beneficiaries of international protection, learn Dutch and find employment as quickly as possible. Pilot programmes were launched in 57 municipalities to test the proposed changes

before their entry into force.[629]

Various initiatives analysed public attitudes towards beneficiaries of international protection and foreigners in general, for example in Austria,[630] Cyprus,[631] Latvia[632] and Lithuania.[633]

[lviii] Quality integration into Croatian society of asylees and persons under subsidiary protection is carried out through a project based on individual approach based on needs, goals and abilities of a person in the early stage. The project "Support in providing assistance in the inclusion of persons with granted international protection in Croatian society" is financed through AMIF in the amount of EUR1.950.000,00 (75 % of the funding from the European Union and 25 % from the state budget).

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